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Untruth—And Consequences

In a book now coming off the press, dealing with his trials, tribulations and triumphs while serving as vice president, Richard Nixon makes a curious admission which California voters should digest thoroughly.

The admission comes during Nixon's account of his last TV debate with President Kennedy.

Kennedy advocated a tougher policy toward Cuba. Nixon says he also favored a tougher policy and had been arguing covertly in the administration for such a policy.

But Nixon felt he could not openly take the stand he was urging in private because even then the CIA was preparing for the ill-fated Cuban invasion and this operation "had to be protected at all costs."

So in the fourth debate, writes Nixon:

"I was in the ironic position of appearing to be 'softer' on Castro than Kennedy was—which was exactly the opposite of the truth."

This is a significant admission.

Here we have a man who was seeking the presidency of the United States, and who now is seeking the governorship of California, admitting that while millions of Americans watched on their TV screens, he took a position "which was exactly the opposite of the truth."

Mr. Nixon's justification for this massive deception is a little difficult to grasp. He appears to argue that if he also had advocated a tougher policy toward Cuba, this might somehow have jeopardized the CIA plan. Just how he arrives at this conclusion is not clear. To advocate a policy during a political

campaign certainly is not prima facie evidence that such a policy already is in effect. If anything, the contrary would seem a more plausible assumption.

But that's beside the point. The point is that Nixon believes massive deception of the American people is a justifiable campaign strategy, given the proper circumstances. He displays not a whit of compunction in his recital of this incident. He gives no indication that he felt any moral issue was even slightly involved in his taking a stand "exactly the opposite of the truth." On the contrary, he seems to feel that his behavior constituted a sort of heroic gesture.

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This is an age of awesome change in many long established concepts. It may be that one of the concepts we must change is our historic regard for truth. Perhaps truth is archaic. Perhaps in this age we cannot afford truth. It may be too dangerous. We must take refuge in the security of falsehood.

Perhaps we must rewrite that old Biblical promise that "the truth shall make you free" to make it fit the new morality which gives status to immorality.

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There is something disturbing in the thought of a man seeking high public office and at the same time confessing that in time of stress he feels impelled to resort to "the opposite of truth."

How are we to know when he may feel the urge to deceive us again? Can we be sure he always will write a book and let us in time know what he has done?

Shades of George Washington!